

What is the Empire?

An Address before St. George's Chapter, Imperial
Daughters of the Empire, Toronto. Nov. 10th, 1910.

BY

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There is an Archipelago in the North Sea which has been the residence for many centuries of a proud and valiant people. The southern part of the largest island had, before the earliest dawn of history, borne on its bosom and sheltered in its caverns a race of cave-dwellers, mere savages, whose weapons were stone; their food, the wild fruit of the forest and the wild beasts which roamed the land, sometimes the shell-fish of the coast and the fish of the sea. But few traces of that troglodytic people remain.

Then came, yet before historic times, a wave from the far-off East, the first of the Aryan folk, Celt or Brython: and they occupied the land—like to and yet not the same as their brethren to the south on the other side of the water in Gallia. Julius Caesar, mighty with the pen as with the sword, when he had invaded the land and left it in some part subdued, tells us of that strange people, the first of those of blood akin unto ours, who lived in beautiful England. Powerful chiefs of powerful tribes incessantly warring one with another, they had not the power to conceive of an Empire—and "The Empire" was not yet even in the making.

After many a bloody fight and much and terrible suffering, the Roman conquered and set up his col-

onial rule—England became part of the Roman Empire—and a child fated to become a Roman Emperor was born in York. But it was the Roman Empire, and colonies were subjects, who existed for the service of the master; and all roads leading to Rome, the tribute of all lands went along these roads and served to support the Mistress of the World—already a Holy City to most of the nations of the earth. “The Empire” was as far removed in its inconceivability as it was in distance in point of time—and it was not yet even in the making.

The Roman left and the Saxon and Angle came in, the Englishman, in ever-increasing numbers; he saw the land that it was good; and the semi-Romanized Celt and the Roman who cast in his lot with him were ruthlessly swept out of the way, some few indeed escaping to their kinsmen in the remote parts of the land—in Wales and Cornwall—and some went to Scotland. Some, too, escaped across the Channel to their friends in Gaul.

Warring sept and clan filled the land with strife and blood, till at length one strong man made himself King of all England. These were men of our race, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh: and when Egbert, one thousand and eighty-three years ago, became King of all England, “The Empire” became a possibility, for then its foundations were laid.

The Saxon rule continued; and a feeling of nationality had become perceptible, helped on as it was by struggle for life with the invading Dane—and he indeed was master of England for a brief space of time—when William the Norman slew King Harold at Senlac, and the Saxon line of monarchs went out in blood.

But, like the Danes, the Normans were of the same stock as the Saxons themselves; and it was not long before Saxon and Norman lived together in amity, if

not in love—and the Norman became proud of his island home. The idea of "The Empire" was now embryonic—"The Empire" became more and more the object toward which all—in great part, indeed, unconsciously—pressed on.

The greatest of the Plantagenets—and the Plantagenets had the blood of Saxon and Norman united in their veins—brought into union with his people the Celts who had made their home in the mountains of Wales—I say "union," for it was not wholly "subjection"—and the first great step toward the Empire was taken when Edward Longshanks, King of England, six hundred and nine years ago, created his fourth son, Edward, the first English Prince of Wales. But this was but a step; for neither then nor two hundred and thirty-four years later, when Wales was formally incorporated with England, could any man have a real conception of the might and grandeur to come.

Plantagenet passed and the monarchy of the Red Rose and of the White—Harry Tudor and Henry, the much-married, and his family passed away—and James Stewart was the next heir. He was already King of Scotland. What was to be done? It could not be that he would resign the Crown of the northern Kingdom, nor would he fail to assert his claim to that of the South. But yet the proud Scot would not bend the knee to the Southron, though his country was poor and ill-manned compared with the other.

In 1603, when James VI of Scotland became James I of England (I shall speak of Ireland again), a step was taken which was prophetic of the Empire yet to be—two peoples retained their separate parliaments, one not subject to the other, but each paramount over its own territory. And each people owed allegiance to the same monarch—they were united by the tie that the same person was their Sovereign and claimed fealty alike from both.

For more than a hundred years this partnership went on, the two nations in general living in harmony, though having little tiffs (or perhaps big ones) from time to time—till the spectre of a disputed succession arose to frighten both.

The Stewart King had fled upon the arrival of William of Orange; Mary, the wife of William, soon died without issue, and all of Anne's seventeen children had died young (when we read of Queen Anne and smile at her dowdiness and bourgeois tastes and manners, how many of us think of the tragedy of a heart-broken mother, who had seen the fair flowers of her garden fade and die one by one?).

James II. was still alive at St. Germain's; and even had he been dead, he had a bonny son—the Scot is a queer mixture of sentiment and thrift—and it was quite within the limits of possibility that when the last daughter of James should die, James himself might be proclaimed King of Scotland—or his son, James Francis, or his grandson, Charles Edward, more admired and more charming. And so negotiations began and were carried on, which resulted in the abolition of the separate Parliaments and the formation of the one Parliament for all the Island. This may seem a backward step and 1707 may appear to be a date of evil omen to "The Empire"—and yet the Union was inevitable if peace were to exist between the two peoples and the same Monarch reign over them. In the latter view—that is the certainty of having the same king—is to be found the real significance, as it was the actual *raison d'être*—of the Union in Queen Anne's time, two hundred and three years ago.

Thus, then, came together in one these two kindred peoples, differing in law, in history and to some extent in language and in manners: but one in their determination to be free from all outside control.

Scotland had herself gone through somewhat the

same course as her neighbour to the South—the antochthonous troglodyte was there, the predecessor, perchance the progenitor, of the Pict. The Scot came by way of Ireland about the beginning of the 6th century—and these joined hands with the Piets of the Highlands, the Black Piets, and became their leaders and masters, and by their aid vanquished the Fair Piets and the Saxons to the south—until at length, in 843, their King, Kenneth McAlpin, Kenneth the Hardy, became King of all North Britain down to the Scots-water or Forth, the land thenceforward to the end of time to be called Scotland. Many a Saxon found his home in the land, and Dane came in and the Norman in the South.

The man of the south of Scotland, however, whether Pict or Saxon or Norman or Dane, was from the first almost more an enthusiast for Scotland than the original Scot. Long and weary were the struggles between the North and South—the South had not, as in England, a vast superiority in numbers and resources, and the Highlandman did not play to the Lowlander the part of Welshman to Englishman. Nor at length was there a real conquest of the Highlands or of the Lowlands, but rather an agreement to live in peace under one king. Many Sassenachs had poured into the South of Scotland before this, and so in 1703 Saxon and Gael in Scotland, and Saxon and Brython in England, after long preparation, joined hands under the last Stewart monarch for a new kingdom—the kingdom of Great Britain. But yet “The Empire” was far away.

Another Isle lay to the West. The early inhabitants of that beautiful land were of the same Celtic stock—many of them at least—as the Celtic people of England. They seem, however, to have been a finer people, more cultured and learned: and Ireland was the land not only of saints, but also the land of scholars. The earlier peoples, however, had not been

entirely extirpated, and then as now the Celt did not have it all his own way; and it may be that some of the virtues (and they are many) of the Irishman derive from an earlier folk than the Celt, a folk much earlier than the traditional Milesian.

The earlier Plantagenet kings had conquered the Island—in a way and to a certain extent—so had the Scot, for Edward, brother of the Bruce, had been King of Ireland after a manner; and an earlier invader, Eochaidh Buidhe, King of Alba, was driven out only after a seven day battle at Moyra or Magrath in 637; but it was not till Cromwell applied his ruthless policy that it can be fairly said that Ireland as a whole was subdued to the sovereignty of England. The bitterest malediction of the Irish peasant is still, after two and a half centuries, "the curse of Cromwell on you"—that very great soldier was very thorough in all he undertook and did not always consider the morality of the means he employed.

Ireland went on by the side of the larger Island with her own Parliament indeed, but a Parliament not independent as that of Scotland—it was almost to the very end ever an inferior Parliament, at least from the time of the first Tudor King, Henry VII., who, by means of Poynings' Laws, subjected the Irish Parliament to the English Privy Council. But Ireland shared with England change of Crown and dynasty; and King James VI. of Scotland became King of Ireland as well as King of England and of Scotland—three Parliaments (England and Ireland having each a separate House of Commons and House of Lords, Scotland having but one Chamber), but all three kingdoms only one King.

Even when, in 1703, England and Scotland became one kingdom—the kingdom of Great Britain—Ireland held aloof; and King George I. was King of the kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland, of two

kingdoms, in addition to wearing the Crown of Hanover.

Into the troubled times in which the Kingdom of Ireland gave up her separate national existence, I do not care to enter: the bitterness caused by the Union of 1800 has not yet lost its force, and the name of Castlereagh is still execrated by many patriotic Irishmen. Before the Union came about, her Parliament had been given full independence: but this independence, granted in 1782, did not prevent the independent Irish Parliament voting for Union, seventeen years after.

For more than a hundred years, there has been one United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and not three separate kingdoms or two. But this Kingdom, mighty as it was and is, with a history of glory second to none, is not "The Empire."

The smaller Islands of the Archipelago were long ago annexed to one or the other part of the largest Island, and have shared in its history. With legislatures of their own (in most instances) they have played no part in the evolution of the United Kingdom: and, loyal and interesting as they are, they need not here be further considered.

But across the sea, hundreds of years ago, daring Britons made homes, actuated some by hope of gain and some by fear of punishment and some by the desire to worship God in their own way. Not, be it remembered, that for the most part they desired religious freedom: what they did desire was not that every man should approach his God and believe in his God as his conscience should dictate, but that they should find a land in which all must worship and believe as they. Colony after colony was founded, and New England arose by the side of New Amsterdam (which, becoming English, became at the same time New York) and Virginia and the Carolines and Georgia and Maryland—Maryland, which, in advance

of the age, actuated by whatever motives, decreed perfect liberty of religion.

Further to the north were New France and Acadia, sparsely peopled by a hardy race—some, fur-hunters and *coureurs du bois*, and some, fishermen who tempted the wild waves rather than the wild forests and wilder Indians. All this territory, whose value was then and for a century thereafter practically unknown, was swept into the lap of Britain; and France, bidding farewell to the northern part of the Continent, the English settlements to the south were united to the territory of the Hudson's Bay Company (itself chartered a century before) by the fair land of Canada.

Now, at least, one would think we should find "The Empire"—but no—those of the old land had not yet learned that people of our race must govern themselves, whether they govern themselves well or ill—this is born in us, is part of our blood—it is of the genius of our race—and the right will never be surrendered but with annihilation. Those of the old land had not yet the true conception of "The Empire." And yet it should not have been difficult for students of history to understand. True, the mighty Empires of antiquity could furnish no model—for Assyria and Babylon and Persia and Rome made slaves of their conquests, no one of a conquered race had any rights except those his conqueror gave him; and even these were in no true sense rights, as they might be at pleasure withdrawn or annulled.

The Empires of Austria and Russia were in like manner wholly different from that which would suit a free-born and free-speaking people—and those of France and Germany and Brazil were yet in the womb of time, even if they could have furnished a satisfactory model—as they could not. But the Holy Roman Empire, successor to the Western Empire of Rome, had lived for centuries, composed of con-

stituent, independent States, self-governing and free (as freedom was then understood); and, with some modification, it might well have served for the English. But the times were not ripe for true Imperialism: blood must be shed and lessons learnt through suffering as well as through valour, before "The Empire" could come to its own.

Unhappily, dissensions arose between the mother country and some of her daughters on this side of the Atlantic—the misunderstandings no doubt were increased by folly on the one side and self-interest on the other. A war ensued, scandalously mismanaged and resulting in unparalleled humiliation—a war as unnecessary as it was deplorable. And the United States of America severed their connection with the rest of the English-speaking peoples.

Slowly but surely arose and grew the true conception of Empire—colony after colony was granted a legislature and, at length, an executive responsible to the people. The Jeremiahs of the old land wailed that the ties binding the colonies to the mother country were being severed one by one, and that soon the daughters setting up house-keeping in a home of their own would wholly repudiate the mother. Fools and blind, who could not comprehend the depth of the devotion, the fervour of the loyalty of the emigrant and his progeny to the land of his origin, could not see that the self-respecting daughter governing her own would more understand and love the old mother than if she were subject to dictation at every step, and humiliated in her own eyes at every turn. But the experiment has succeeded, and not only Canada but Newfoundland and Australia and New Zealand and South Africa have been granted Home Rule, so far as that is consistent with their remaining part of the British Dominions.

And now we see "The Empire" nearly full-grown. A strong central government, seated in the capital

or the Empire (which is also the capital of the World), in whose hands is the power to veto or nullify any legislation passed anywhere in the British world—throughout this world are governments each vested with the power and duty to govern some particular part of it—their acts are subject to the scrutiny of the British in that portion, and the Government must satisfy that people. To prevent interference through inadvertence, ignorance or design, with the good of the Empire at large, the supervising power is still vested in the mother land. But she never interferes, satisfied that her daughters are doing what they conceive to be best for themselves and for her and her other children.

The one tie which binds the whole Empire together is the King—God bless him. The King is not only the object of our heartfelt devotion: he is part of every legislature throughout the British world, and every administrative act is done in his name. He is in theory in every Court of Justice, and it is under his commissions that the officers of the Canadian Army, Navy and Militia act.

And this to me is the true conception of "The Empire"—a King to unite the loyalty of all, a strong central government to watch over the interests of all and a local government to administer, to the satisfaction of the British of each part of His Majesty's Dominions, the affairs of that part.

It may, indeed, be decreed that there is to be a still further division of government—unless the signs fail and the political prophets are in error, it is not impossible that the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland is to be dissolved into its original three Kingdoms, thus carrying out the suggestion of Sir John A. Macdonald, the first Prime Minister of Canada. I am not giving an opinion as to the wisdom of the proposed step—that is to be decided by those of both sides of politics in the old land. But if local legis-

latures are granted to England, Ireland and Scotland, it can never be that these will be supreme, any more than the Parliament of Canada is supreme. There must remain somewhere some body, Parliamentary or otherwise, which shall have the power of protecting the interests of the whole British people, considering and dealing with the British people as a whole.

If the example of Canada is followed (as Sir John A. Macdonald advised) there will be a Parliament at Westminster, whose authority will correspond to the authority of our own Parliament at Ottawa, and Parliaments or Legislatures at London, Edinburgh and Dublin (perhaps at Cardiff or Carnarvon also), whose authority will be similar to that of our Legislatures at Toronto or Quebec.

It may be that in the Imperial Parliament there will be—and if logic prevailed, there would be—representatives from all parts of the British Empire to consult with their brethren on what concerns the British world at large, and not simply England, Ireland and Scotland. But we are not a logical race: while the Frenchman will fight and die for an idea, the Briton is satisfied with something that will work; and logic may be—as with us it generally is—set aside, and convenience alone consulted.

Any such devolution of power by the central Parliament would be just carrying out the idea of Empire which I have been endeavouring to lay before you: and while the lovers of all that is old may mourn, it will not be at all destructive of anything really worth retaining.

And now where do we, you and I, stand in respect of "The Empire?" In respect of the two cardinal principles—self government and amity with our brethren—what is our attitude?

So far as voting is concerned, we are on a par—none of us can vote. That His Majesty's Justice shall

not vote, is wholly right—he should not take part in politics or in framing the laws he is to administer.

Whether women should vote or not, is still a vexed question, into which I do not propose to enter. If, and when, they seriously wish the franchise, it cannot be denied them; but it may be that the time is not yet, and possibly, indeed, it may never come—I am not a prophet or the son of a prophet. But at the least you all may influence a vote, as I may not.

So far as concerns our self-government, I do not think there is any real sentiment, much less movement, toward at all letting go of that. You will hear and read speeches and articles which seem to indicate that the speaker or writer is advocating some relaxation upon the hold we have upon the government of our own country; but I venture to think that there is no fear of any politician—much less statesman—who will find his account in any real diminution of the rights which we enjoy.

As to British unity, that I think is equally secure.

Plato says that nothing is so cruel as patriotism.

When the Athenians, with wives and children, had crossed the Strait to the Isle of Salamis to avoid the Persian invader, they saw from the rocky cliffs of that island the frail wooden walls go up in flames, walls placed by those who thought they could interpret better than Themistocles the saying of the Pythian priestess that the beloved City of the Violet Crown would be saved by wooden walls—and who, rejecting the common-sense interpretation of their general, relied upon the strict letter of the utterance of the inspired prophetess and thought that when the god said “wooden walls” he meant “wooden walls” and not “wooden ships.” And temple and fane were demolished, the foot of the barbarian trod the Pnyx and was placed even upon the sacred Bema—the olive trees were hewed down, and even the sacred tree,

planted by Pallas Athene herself, became a prey to the flames.

One man, crazed by the loss of all he possessed, and losing faith in the protection of the goddess, who seemed helpless to save even her own temple and tree, suggested that the Athenians should submit to the Persian and so buy peace and security. He was slain by his angered countrymen—and the women, burning with patriotism, stoned to death his wife, while the children killed his children. Nothing but patriotism could have so infuriated these women as to cause them to slaughter an innocent sister, having no act or part in her husband's treason. Patriotism is always cruel—and often unjust.

In these days we do not perhaps kill those whose opinions differ from our own: but patriotism is still cruel and often unjust. It was once the custom to charge a political opponent with all sorts of villainies; and naturally treason, open or veiled, was among them. About a year ago, addressing the Canadian Society of New York, I made use of the following language, which I venture to hope is substantially true:

"There is no fear or hope (put it each one as he will) that Canada will ever form part of the American Union—there must be two, not one, great English-speaking nations upon this continent. . . .

"Nor do I think that ever we will cease to belong to the British Empire.

"Canada, unless all our history prove misleading and the future wholly belie the past, must continue a part of that nation upon whose flag the sun never sets. Daniel Webster nearly seventy years ago spoke of that Empire even then as 'a power to which Rome in the height of her glory is not to be compared—a power which has dotted over the surface of the whole globe with her possessions and military posts, whose morning drumbeat following the sun and keeping

company with the hours, circles the earth with one continuous and unbroken strain of the martial airs of England.' And since then what an advance!

"Whether, indeed, we shall continue to be in a manner apart from the stream of world-politics, leaving international relations largely in the hands of our brethren across the sea—or whether we shall enter into a closer relationship with our fellow-subjects in the British Isles and so with those in the other Dominions and Commonwealth under the same flag, thereby ceasing to occupy the position of daughter and taking that rather of sister, is upon the knees of the gods—or rather of God.

"But we cling to British connection with a sincere affection and a whole heart—the tie which binds us is not simply the legal and constitutional bond and not alone the silver cord of sentiment, but also the heart-felt conviction that there exists no single agency for good in the world at the present time to be compared with the British Empire. Great is Britain and she has made great mistakes; but with all her faults, she stands in the very forefront in the struggle for right and freedom.

"So we have made our choice, an irrevocable choice: our statesmen vie with each other in showing loyalty to the Crown and all classes are ardent supporters of British connection. Even the school children throughout our broad land, in shrill sweet treble are singing:

" 'Live for your flag, O Builders of the North!
For age to age shall glorify its worth:
Of precious blood its red is dyed,
The white is honour's sign,
Through weal or ruth, its blue is truth,
Its might the Power Divine.
Live for your flag, O Builders of the North!
Canada! Canada! in God go forth!'

"The future of Canada is indissolubly united with that of Britain, and the patriot's eye must ever turn in her direction."

It may be that there are doubts—honest doubts—and fears—honest fears—in the minds of some as to the loyalty of brother or sister Canadian. If so, let each one search his heart and see if it be not the cruelty of patriotism, sincere patriotism as it may be, that leads him to doubt his fellow. To build up a great country we must be united; to be united, we must have faith one in the other, and that faith must be based upon confidence in the truth and loyalty of political opponent, as well as political friend.

When we doubt another, let us try to get his point of view, and without political prejudice or political bitterness, try to see if his viewpoint is not also that of a sincere patriot, differ as it may from our own. Let patriotism not be unjust, even though it must always be cruel: and justice being done to all, I have the fullest confidence that all Canadians—the exceptions will be trifling and of no importance, either in number or weight—will be found true, not only to self-government, but also to British Union.

And it is for this that your organization has its being.